

YOUR DAUGHTERS DID PROPHECY

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Submitted to the Faculty of the  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
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In grateful appreciation for the lives of Elaine, Nancy and Nelle--my foremothers and sisters in the faith. And for Al, a co-worker in the Gospel who is especially adept at editing, supporting and encouraging.

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## ABSTRACT

The paper "Your Daughters Did Prophecy" documents evidence for Biblical and historical precedent for women's participation in preaching and prophesying ministries. It cites specific activities of women as recorded in the New Testament, Apocryphal writings and a selection of early church fathers that refer to the first two centuries. The focus of the paper is on the activity of women rather than on opinions expressed about the role of women.

The paper uses the historical critical method of interpretation applied to ancient primary sources. The attempt has been to view these sources in light of their contexts with comment from secondary sources. It reflects upon preaching issues and practices of today as they grow out of the research.

The findings are of a rich heritage of women preachers within the Christian tradition. To date, the church has neglected this aspect of its history. To the extent that the church includes women in the foundation of the teaching and preaching ministries, the stronger and more balanced the structure of the church will be. Clergy and lay women particularly benefit from an inclusive church in that their own rootedness in the faith is strengthened by knowledge of these foremothers. The whole church will benefit from this knowledge as it will begin to see itself as growing in wholeness as reflected in creation (Genesis 1:27).

The information contained in this paper is suitable for studies in the local church. It is also useful for preaching, as it enlarges the church's concept of women in Scripture.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Problem

This project, "Your Daughters Did Prophecy," seeks to address three problems in the church today. The first problem is the church's lack of knowledge about the extent and influence of women preachers in Biblical times. The second problem is the identity of women today, who lack role models for preaching, especially from the Biblical perspective. The third problem this project addresses is the church's concept and image of itself as a whole entity, female and male together, well grounded in scripture and tradition.

#### Importance of the Problem

These are important issues for us today for several reasons. The church is becoming more and more diverse in its membership, theology, and doctrine. It is therefore important to have a clear understanding of our identity as a church. In the past we have had a select representation of perspectives doing the theologizing, researching and naming. As we grow more inclusive, we find that there are broader dimensions to the church that must be named and included in our corporate story.

This has become especially significant over the past decade as we have seen a large increase of clergy and lay women assuming professional leadership in the church. This increase in church leadership by women has generated a renewed search for female predecessors

of the faith. Women are raising questions about traditional understandings of Biblical research, history, culture and interpretation.

Knowledge of our roots becomes especially important when the phenomenon of women in the leadership of the church is seen as either something new or as a fad that will someday go away. There are some who would have us believe that because women preachers are relatively new in the church we must proceed slowly.

### Thesis of the Project

This project is an attempt to demonstrate that women have been preaching and prophesying and have been in strong positions of leadership for as long as the church has been in existence. This knowledge has a three-fold effect: 1) It calls the church into greater wholeness as a reflection of God's creation. It changes the ways in which we have traditionally understood Christianity and the assumptions we have made about our heritage. Christians can be freed from unnecessary bonds by fuller knowledge of who we are. 2) It gives today's clergy women a greater knowledge of our grounding in Biblical tradition. This is not to say that women's authority to preach depends upon a number of proof texts from the Bible or tradition. Even if there were not precedence for women's preaching, that would not change God's call upon women to preach today. To know that we stand in a long line of women who preached, gives us a greater sense of tradition. 3) All women of the church benefit from the strong images of women found in scripture. Our strengths and spirits are fortified by knowledge of those who have labored before us. The thesis of this paper is that clergywomen and



the church at large will grow in spiritual power by claiming our full heritage.

### Definition of Major Terms

The term used most frequently in this paper are "preaching" and "prophesying." These terms are used interchangeably, although there are differences in their meanings in general use. Since we do not know the content of the speaking of most women preachers cited in this paper, we cannot determine which word applies best. "Preaching" and "prophesying" are defined as "the activity of publicly proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ."

### Work In The Field Done By Others

In recent years there has been a renewed explosion of literature in the field of women in religion. Among these a few deal with the subject of women and preaching. These are generally found in the area of biblical research. The bibliography reflects the growth of material in general. There are four works which are of particular interest to this study.

Leopold Zscharnack published Der Dienst der Frau in den ersten Jahrhunderten der christlichen Kirche in 1902. This book laid significant groundwork in the area of women in the early church. The book covers such topics as women and ordination, deaconesses, widows, women in the Gnostic movements and in Montanism. He also discusses women as missionaries and prophetesses.

Since Zscharnack's work of 1902, we have seen a more recent

influx of interest. Roger Gryson published The Ministry of Women in the Early Church which is a good compilation of references. Gryson's focus is on the more orthodox sources of Christianity. His bibliography and notes are extremely helpful. While some have criticized him for the strict orthodoxy of his approach, his book has been helpful in the preparation of this paper.

Leonard Swidler has contributed to the field with his book Biblical Affirmations of Woman. This work discusses the feminine imagery of God, woman in Hebrew-Jewish tradition and woman in the Christian tradition. He discusses the positive, ambivalent and negative images of woman in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. Swidler has been very helpful in compiling all the references to women in Scripture. However, he has not gone far enough in looking at the activity of women. His interest seems to be more in creating a positive and inclusive picture of the Christian heritage. He co-edited a book with Arlene Swidler, Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration. This book is a compilation of some fifty articles addressing the role of women in the church, with specific comment on the Vatican Declaration V. Articles discuss such issues as priesthood, ecumenism, the church fathers and the ministry of women, the twelve, apostleship in early Christianity, Goddess worship, Paul's attitude toward women, the sacraments, and many more issues. Although the articles are very brief and do not lend themselves for extensive study, their notes and bibliographies do lead one to more information.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is making significant contributions to this field. Her articles appear in Women Priests and in Women of

Spirit as well as several journals. She is one of the few who are interested in the history of women, not just on opinions about women. Her articles "The Apostleship of Women in Early Christianity," and "Word, Spirit and Power: Women in Early Christian Communities" were very formative for this paper.

### Methodology

The historical critical method of interpretation has been applied to ancient primary sources. The attempt has been to view these sources in light of their contexts with comment from secondary sources.

### Scope and Limitation

This paper is limited in its scope to the early church of the first two centuries as found in the New Testament and other sources of the early church referring to the first two centuries.

The paper will not consider women who may have held leadership roles, but did not preach. The real focus of the paper is on the activity of women as can best be reconstructed. Not all statements about women found in Paul, Deutero-Pauline writings, Tertullian, Eusebius and others will be discussed. This paper is less concerned about what anyone said about women, than what the women actually did. It is of interest to also show where women appealed to earlier women for their authority to preach.

While this paper is primarily a research paper, it does intersect with the discipline of preaching. My procedure will be to discuss the ancient sources and then their implications for the church today

in particular for women in the church.

### Outline of the Chapters

A brief outline of the chapters is as follows: Chapter two examines women in preaching ministries reported in the Gospels. This includes Anna, Mary Magdalene, the women who traveled with Jesus, and the Samaritan woman. Chapter three examines the evidence for women preaching in the rest of the New Testament. This chapter is organized geographically with subdivisions on women in Palestine, Greece, Asia, Macedonia, and Italy. There is also an excursus on the order of widows. Chapter four examines early extra-canonical literature which documents women preaching in the early church. We will look at the Acts of Paul and Thecla, the New Prophecy movement and the Marcionites. Chapter five is the concluding chapter which reflects upon the implications of the research found in the previous three chapters. In this chapter the discipline of preaching is brought into focus, with particular implications for today.

## CHAPTER TWO

### WOMEN PREACHERS IN THE GOSPELS

We begin our study by examining the evidence of women preaching or prophesying in the Gospels. There are two approaches to this subject. One approach is to examine the attitude of Jesus and what he did for the status of women. Leonard Swidler is among those who have written from this perspective. Swidler puts forth the idea that Jesus was a feminist. His basic approach is that women had a very low status in Judaism and Jesus turned that around by including women in his teaching, preaching, and as his companions. Dr. Swidler's articles have been helpful at causing us to look again at the Gospels and raising new questions. It is not the intent of this project to make a statement regarding the views Jesus may or may not have held. The intent is to lift up for consideration what women were actually doing as reported in the Gospels. We will begin with Anna.

#### ANNA

The account which includes Anna occurs early in the Gospel according to Luke.

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36-38)

This passage follows the account of Joseph and Mary taking the baby Jesus to the Temple for the purification rite. They went to

Simeon and then following is the Song of Simeon.

The account of Anna raises some interesting questions. One prevailing assumption is that women did not participate in the public life of the Temple. And yet here is a story where a woman was clearly involved in the Temple. However we may understand her "worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day," it clearly points to her presence at the Temple a great deal. Also, the text does not treat it as something unusual for a woman to be so involved at the Temple. It is described uneventfully as though it was a normal activity. This causes us to question how much we know about women in Judaism. Perhaps scholars have not taken into account real differences of practice that may have occurred. Further work in this area would be very beneficial.

The obvious thing we notice about the text is its conclusion: "(she) spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel." This is preaching in its best sense! She is in the Temple and she is spreading the good news to anyone who will listen to her. She is prophesying about this child who is the Messiah. It is no different for Anna to be in the Temple than for Simeon. She is named as a prophetess and she is definitely preaching the word!

#### THE WOMEN AT THE BEGINNING AND END OF JESUS' MINISTRY

The next passage to consider comes also from Luke:

Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits

and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means. (Luke 8:1-3)

Luke's account occurs early in Jesus' public ministry. It lists the people who faithfully followed him throughout his ministry. We notice the predominance of women in this list.

There are parallel accounts of this listing in the other two synoptic Gospels. The setting for Matthew and Mark is different from Luke's. For both Matthew and Mark, this parallel list occurs at the crucifixion of Jesus.

There were also many women here, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him; among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. (Matthew 27:55f.)

Compare this with the account from Mark:

There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome, who when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered to him and also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem. (Mark 15:40f.)

Note that the first person mentioned in each account is Mary Magdalene. Note also that there are different combinations of names in each synoptic account. What is significant in these accounts is first, they occur in each of the synoptic Gospels. This repetition assures us that these lists were widely shared in the early community. Multiple attestations such as these are more reliable historically than if an account occurs only once. Secondly, the women named early in the Lukan account seem to be the same group of women who stayed with Jesus to the crucifixion. This group of women are identified as those who followed

Jesus along with the twelve.<sup>1</sup>

We noted earlier that Mary Magdalene is mentioned first on each of the lists of women. She is the best known of the women mentioned, possibly because of her dramatic healing. She was also evidently close to Jesus and was often with him. We will see later that she is usually named first on lists of women in other places in the Gospels as well.

In regard to the other women mentioned Witherington states the following:

Joanna is a long-time disciple, present with Mary at the tomb and the upper room, and thereafter bearing witness. She is very unlike Mary of Magdala who came from a small town and was undoubtedly an 'untouchable' until Jesus healed her. Joanna is wife to Chuza who managed Herod's estate. Thus she was a woman of some means and prominence....The third woman, Susanna, though perhaps known to Luke's audience, is unknown to us and is not mentioned elsewhere in the Gospel. Luke intends for us to understand that these three women were only the most prominent among ἑτεραι πολλάί women that followed Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

These women evidently provided for the ministry of Jesus out of their own resources. Joanna may have had some financial resources since her husband was Herod's steward.

These women are mentioned in this context, even though the text does not specifically state that they were preaching, because of their abiding presence with Jesus. These women were with Jesus from very early in his ministry to the very end. It is difficult to believe they

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<sup>1</sup>An illuminating article: Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Twelve," in Arlene and Leonard Swidler (eds.) Women Priests (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 114-122.

<sup>2</sup>Ben Witherington, III, "On the Road with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and other Disciples--Luke 8:1-3," Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, LXX: 3/4 (1979), 246.



were silent during these years. These were women who had been affected by Jesus' ministry one way or another. We see from other stories in the Gospels, that people were not usually quiet about the affect Jesus had on their lives. Secondly, they are mentioned in connection with the twelve who are specifically mentioned as having a preaching ministry. We must not presume that these women were quiet and inactive while a vital ministry was goind on.

Witherington takes it even further in his commentary on the text:

It is no accident that Luke places this text early in his Gospel. He wishes to show that these women had been witnesses from the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee and thus were valid witnesses of the resurrection and for the church. (Luke 23:55 and Acts 1:14).... the purpose of this pericope are: 1) to reveal the proper response to the healing and teaching of Jesus Christ--true discipleship involves serving the Lord and the brethren in whatever way is needed from whatever resources one has; 2) to point out that women are equally called to be disciples and witnesses as part of the universal spread of the Gospel; 3) to show that Jesus brings in the "acceptable day of the Lord" which liberates the captives and poor (women fitting one or both categories), and which fulfill Joel's prophecy (3:1-5) of women speaking God's word, 4) to show the continuing loyalty of these women as disciples of Christ--that they were prepared to be the 'last at the cross, first the tomb!....<sup>3</sup>

Witherington makes a convincing argument for the discipleship of these women and their ministry as witnessing to Jesus Christ. While we have no direct evidence of actual preaching, if we compare them with other followers in every respect, it is difficult to imagine that they were not preaching and telling the story with conviction.

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<sup>3</sup>Witherington, pp. 247-248.

## THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

The next passage to consider is from the Gospel of John:

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "how is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water. The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" Jesus said to her, "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst; the water that I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly." The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know he will show us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Just then his disciples came. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, "What do you wish?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the city and were coming to him. Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." (John 4:7-30, 39-42).

There is a wealth of material that one could discuss from this story found in John. Before embarking upon the discussion germane to our purpose here, we must say a word about this story and its use for us. We must note that John's Gospel was written later than the Synoptic Gospels. It was thus further away from the historical events it describes. Also, the author of the Gospel of John had different theological purposes than did any of the synoptic writers. Much of the imagery and details of the stories are included to fortify the writer's perspective. The perspective of the author tells us about the Johannine community out of which the author came, including the traditions which were preserved by them.

We must also note that this particular story only occurs in John. That is not to say it is less important, but only that we should be cautious in approaching it as an historically reliable story. Given that context then, we can discuss this account.

While there are many issues contained in this passage, our focus will only be on the woman and her response to the word. In her progression of faith can be seen. She was astonished that a Jew would even speak to her, a Samaritan. The writer of the Gospel depicts the disciples as being amazed that Jesus would talk with a woman.

She slowly begins to discover that he is more than an ordinary man. Through their dialogue, she discovers that indeed she is talking with the Christ, the Messiah. She then went to share this with others. Raymond E. Brown makes the connection with Jesus' intercessory prayer in the following:

The Samaritan villagers believe because of the woman's word (4:39, 42: dia ton logon (lalian) pisteuein). This expression is significant

because it occurs again in Jesus' "priestly" prayer for his disciples: "It is not for these alone that I pray, but also for those who believe in me through their word" (17:20: dia ton logon pisteuein). In other words, the Evangelist can describe both a woman and the (presumably male) disciples at the Last Supper as bearing witness to Jesus through preaching and thus bringing people to believe in him on the strength of their word.<sup>4</sup>

There is no doubt that according to this account, the Samaritan woman received the Word and then left immediately to spread that Word. She caused people to believe by her word and brought them to the Christ.

For those who would discount her witness based on verse 42, we must be reminded that this is preaching at its best. It is the promise and hope of preaching that persons will be brought to encounter the real Christ through the word. That is precisely what the woman from Samaria did. She shared her own experience with the people, they were convinced by her story, and then she led them to meet the Christ himself. What better paradigm for preaching than this!

The passage preceding this story was an interchange between Jesus and the disciples about the fields being ripe for the harvest. She has illustrated that readiness by bringing a number of Samaritans to Jesus. She, a laborer was ready and able to take up the missionary activity indicated by Jesus. Her ministry was preaching in the best sense and the fruits of her labor were great. The fact that this passage was preserved in the Gospel may be a good indication about the understanding of the role of women by the Johannine community.

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<sup>4</sup>Raymond Brown, "Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel," Theological Studies, XXXVI (1975), 691.

## WOMEN OF THE RESURRECTION

The last passages for consideration are the post resurrection accounts. These are found in Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-11, Luke 24:1-11 and John 20:1-18.

We immediately notice that Mary Magdalene is again named first in each one of these accounts. The groupings are slightly different each time, but she always heads the list, emphasizing her importance in the early communities. In Matthew she is listed first and then the "other Mary." In Mark, Mary Magdalene is listed, then Mary, the Mother of James, and then Salome. In Luke Mary Magdalene is listed, then Johanna, then Mary the mother of James and the "other women." In John, only Mary Magdalene is listed as being present.

In each of the accounts the women arrive to anoint the body but find the tomb empty. There is some disparity among the stories about what happened next. Matthew reports an earthquake which none of the other gospels mention. The three synoptics have angels tell the women what happened, and who ask them to go and tell the others. Matthew and Luke must have had a different source than Mark at this point, for Mark's version reports the women being afraid and saying nothing at first. In Matthew's and Luke's version, the women did as the angel said to them, telling the disciples about the resurrection of Jesus. Mark's version portrays the appearance of Jesus on the first day of the week and only to Mary Magdalene. She then went out and told the disciples, but they did not believe her.

John's Gospel is different from the synoptics. In his account

Mary Magdalene was alone. She discovered the empty tomb and then ran and told Peter and the other disciple. After seeing what happened Peter and the other disciple left. Mary was outside the tomb weeping when Jesus appeared to her. Jesus commanded her to tell the others that Jesus was ascending to the Father. Verse 18 says: "Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord;' and she told them that he had said these things to her."

In each and every account, it is to a woman, Mary Magdalene, that the appearance of the risen Lord is given. She is also commissioned to go and tell the others. Brown also agrees,

It is to a woman, Mary Magdalene, that Jesus first appears, instructing her to go and tell his "brothers" (the disciples: 20:17 and 18) of his ascension to the father. In the stories of the angel(s) at the empty tomb, the women are given a message for the disciples; but in John (and in Matthew) Mary Magdalene is sent by the risen Lord himself, and what she proclaims is the standard apostolic announcement of the Resurrection: "I have seen the Lord."<sup>5</sup>

It is not surprising, then, in the Gnostic churches the testimonies of Mary Magdalene carry great weight. In fact there seems to have been some rivalry among the disciples as found in the Gospel of Thomas. According to the Gospel, Mary had given a testimony about Jesus (this is post-resurrection). Andrew and Peter heard it with disbelief.

"Then Mary wept and said to Peter: "My brother Peter, what dost thou then believe? Dost thou believe that I imagined this myself in my heart, or that I would lie about the Saviour?" Levi answered and said to Peter: "Peter, thou hast ever been of a hasty temper. Now I see how thou dost exercise thyself against the woman like the adversaries. But if the Saviour hath made her worthy, who when art thou, that thou reject her? Certainly the Saviour knows her surely enough. Therefore did he love her more than us. Let us rather be ashamed, put on the perfect Man, as he charged us, and proclaim the Gospel without requiring any further command or any further

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<sup>5</sup>Brown, 693.

law beyond that which the Saviour said."<sup>6</sup>

The disciples then went their ways to spread the word. It is interesting that there may have been jealousy over Mary's possible favorable role with Jesus. She evidently was given additional information that the other disciples were not.

In the most important dimension of the Christian faith, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we see that in all four Gospel accounts the word was given to Mary Magdalene who then told the rest of the disciples. Whether or not they believed her is another matter, but the point is she is the one who was commissioned. In John's Gospel, Peter and the other disciple even had an opportunity but it was to Mary that Jesus appeared and it was Mary that he commissioned to go and tell... to go and preach...to go give the Good News!

Again, we find the paradigm for preaching: To be touched by Jesus Christ, that is to experience first hand the healing redemption he offered. Then to be commissioned to go and spread the news, to go and tell the story. In each case, lives were changed because of the testimony of the women. Upon looking at the Gospels there can be no doubt that women were involved in the preaching and prophetic ministries during the time of Jesus. From our Gospel accounts, it seems that Jesus was not greatly interested in whether someone was female or male, or in their nationality or color. It was more important that they understood the Gospel message of transforming love, and they then passed it on.

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<sup>6</sup>New Testament Apocrypha, ed. Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), I, 343.

This list is not exhaustive in terms of the number of women with whom Jesus healed, taught, ate, talked, and travelled. The gifts and graces of God show no partiality. Women of the first century caught the spirit and taught the spirit with their lives and by telling the story.



## CHAPTER THREE

FURTHER EVIDENCE FOR WOMEN PREACHERS  
IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We now wish to examine the balance of the New Testament, including the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's Letters, and other letters. The most controversial person in light of women's issues has been Paul. Paul, or Deutero-Paul has been used to justify the subordinating of women in the church, as well as to justify the full ordination and participation of women in the church.

One can spend days reading articles representing various points of view regarding what Paul might have meant by his various statements. There is also much discussion of which literature is authentic Pauline and which may be interpolations into authentic Pauline literature. Much of this material is reflected in the bibliography. It seems as though the primary motivation for most of this discussion is either to condemn Paul or to save Paul in the eyes of the church. Many of the titles reflect this: "Paul: Chauvinist or Liberationist?", "Was Paul a Male Chauvinist?", "Chauvinist or Feminist? Paul's View of Women." There are many more. It appears that we have had a need to smooth out Paul's statements in an attempt to make him an acceptable contemporary of our own day. All of this discussion has indeed been useful and interesting. At the outset I want to say that this is not the focus of my paper. While I am interested in Paul as one of the significant ancestors of the faith, I am not interested in making him either a chauvinist or a feminist. There is a fair amount of material which

tries to do this, mostly with unsatisfactory conclusions. Again, the focus of this project is to look at what women were actually doing.

Whatever Paul may have said about the role of women in Corinthians and whatever the Deutero-Pauline writings may have also said later, it is quite apparent from Scripture that Paul worked with, traveled with, ministered with and wrote about and to women. The evidence suggests that women were quite involved in the formation of the early church.

The approach to this material will be geographic which will give us a better understanding of the extent of women's activities.

#### WOMEN IN PALESTINE

It is important to begin here, not only for its location, but also because of its relevance in relationship to the Gospel and the rest of the New Testament. The passage under consideration is what we understand to be the first Pentecost experience for the Christian church, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the beginnings of a church.

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away; and when they had entered, they went up to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All this with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. Acts 1:12-14<sup>1</sup>

This passage is important in light of Acts 2, for this group was part of the larger community who received the Holy Spirit in the

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<sup>1</sup>The translation used throughout this paper is the Revised Standard Version with minor changes for inclusive language.

story of the Pentecost.

"And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Acts 2:3-4

There was no apparent distinction in this experience of the Holy Spirit, it rested on each and gave them utterance. I believe it is significant, then, that the speech of verses 14ff. are in part taken from Joel where the declaration is made that the spirit will be poured out on all flesh and "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy..."

This event is traditionally understood as the beginning of the church. It is evident and significant that women were a part of that event. Women received the spirit of utterance as well as men.

There is significant literature<sup>2</sup> which suggests that this event of both women and men "giving utterance" is congruent with Old Testament evidence which suggests that women were more active in the life of the temple and the Hebrew faith than heretofore acknowledged. Therefore I am not suggesting that the Acts account is anything new in the tradition. The quote of Joel may suggest rather a continuity in the tradition, or an assumption that women would be a part of the prophetic tradition.

Much later in Acts we find another account of women prophesying in the area of Palestine in Acts 21:7-9. This account is later than the first account in Acts.

When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and we greeted the brethren and stayed with them for one day. On

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<sup>2</sup>On this see Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin, Clarence Vos, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.

the morrow we departed and came to Caesarea; and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. And he had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.

This is a very brief reference, but it is very direct. It is the only reference to the four daughters, but the reference is clear that they were prophets. They must have been well known prophets of their day for we find reference to them in later writings. In Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History he makes reference to the Daughters of Philip. Swidler points out that "The reputation of Philip's daughters as prophets was so significant and long-lasting in its influence that their burial place was used...to back (a) claim of apostolicity."<sup>3</sup> Then from Ecclesiastical History by Eusebius we find:

"After him there were four women prophets at Hierapolis in Asia, daughters of Philip. Their grave is there, as is their father's... Luke in the Acts of the Apostles refers to Philip's daughters as then living with their father at Caesarea in Judaea and endowed with the prophetic gift."<sup>4</sup>

We shall see later in Chapter Three that the influence of these four prophetesses was to carry beyond their life time.

We turn now from Palestine to examine the activity of women in Greece.

#### WOMEN IN GREECE

The first woman for our consideration is Phoebe. She is mentioned

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<sup>3</sup> Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), p. 302.

<sup>4</sup> Eusebius Pamphili, Ecclesiastical History (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955), III, 31.

in Romans 16:1-2.

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well." Romans 16:1-2.

Let us begin by looking at the issue of translation. The first word we must consider is *diakonos* which is translated in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible as "deaconess." This is the only place where *diakonos* is translated thusly. Roger Gryson addresses this issue:

"Many scholars boldly connect this text with those of the third century where the institution of deaconess appeared clearly defined for the first time and translated *diakonos* as "deaconess" instead of the more general term "minister," which we prefer; they consider Phoebe the first deaconess. If this assumption is true, then this order goes back to apostolic times. ...Scholars have noted that toward the end of the decade 50-60, *diakonos* (servant, minister) did not designate a specific function. Even Paul introduces himself, as well as his co-workers, as *diakonos* (servant, minister) of Christ, the gospel, of the New Covenant, etc. and speaks of his apostolic works as *diakonos* (service, ministry)...It must be noted however, that in the case of Phoebe, *diakonos* refers to a specific service, not to the general service of God, which includes the whole of Christian life. ... The naming of this term is determined by a genitive ("minister of the church at Cenchreae"), not by a dative indicating the beneficiary of the service.<sup>5</sup>

We see here that Gryson is making a case for a specific function that Phoebe may have had as *diakonos*. This discussion is taken even further by E. Earle Ellis. He suggests also a rather restricted meaning of the term *diakonos*.

"...the term is used of 'preachers' or with reference to preaching activity both in secular sources and in the New Testament. In contrast to their opponents in Corinth, Paul and his companions, *diakonoi* of the new covenant, did not 'peddle' or 'falsify' the word of God but rather accepted pay from other churches 'for

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<sup>5</sup>Roger Gryson, Ministry of Women in the Early Church (Collegeville, MN: Order of St. Benedict, 1976), pp. 3-4.

*diakonia* to you,' i.e., to preach the gospel to them."<sup>6</sup>

He continues with a second point that *diakonos* may include teaching as well. He concludes saying that "*diakonia* appear to be a special class of co-workers, those who are active in preaching and teaching."<sup>7</sup>

The evidence suggests that Phoebe was in a significant leadership position, which would naturally include public speaking and preaching. The disturbing thing about the translation issue is that a person's function and role in the early community can be obscured simply by the way it is translated. This issue arises again with Phoebe as we continue in Romans and we get to the word *prostatis*, which is translated in the RSV as "helper." In the Bauer's Greek Lexicon the masculine form of the word is translated as "defender, guardian, of gods." The feminine form is translated "protectress, patroness, helper." Of this Gryson says:

"The term "Helper" (*prostatis*) evokes a custom known by the ancients as "patronage," by which material assistance and moral support were given by more fortunate and influential persons to the communities or to some individuals, who made up their "clientele." ... The description of Phoebe as the *diakonos* of the church at Cenchreae indicates the point where the original charism is becoming as office."<sup>8</sup>

Schüssler Firoenza takes it further when she states: "The second title of Phoebe, *prostatis*, is usually translated as "helper" or "patroness," even though in the literature of the time it has the connotation of leading officer, president, governor or superintendent.

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<sup>6</sup>E. Earle Ellis, "Paul and His Co-Workers," New Testament Studies, XVII (1970-1971), 442.

<sup>7</sup>Ellis, p. 442.

<sup>8</sup>Gryson, p. 4.

In I Thessalonians 5:12 the verb characterizes persons with authority in the community, and in I Timothy 3:4f. and 5:17 it designates the functions of the bishop, deacon or elder. Phoebe thus had a designated role of leadership and teaching in the community of Cenchreae."<sup>9</sup>

It appears that Phoebe was a significant person indeed in the life of the early church. Gilbert points out that Phoebe is the only member of the church of Cenchreae whose name has come down to us. Meyer makes the point that Phoebe was sent to Rome by Paul on official business. "He implores the Christians of the Eternal City to receive her and to cooperate with her ministry."<sup>10</sup> We must imagine a woman who is both *diakonos* and *prostatis*, who is commended by Paul with the injunction to "help her in whatever she may require from you." Certainly this was not a woman who was silent in the church or who was limited in her role. She is given authority over those to whom she is sent. Clearly preaching, and prophesying, and leading the community are the tasks she bore.

Another woman in Greece is Chloe. She is mentioned in I Corinthians 1:11, but quoting verse 10 is also useful:

I appeal to you brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissension among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgement. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you.

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<sup>9</sup>Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Word, Spirit and Power: Women in Early Christian Communities," in Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (eds.) Women of Spirit (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), p. 36.

<sup>10</sup>Charles Meyer, "Ordained Women in the Early Church," Chicago Studies, IV (1965), 287.

It appears by this passage that Chloe is a significant person in the community at Corinth. A specific group of people are named as being "her people." It is quite probable that they worshipped in her home and with her leadership. These people obviously had great concern for the growth and harmony of the church at Corinth.

Certainly it is conjecture to make the leap from this verse to the claim that Chloe may have preached. However, this idea may not be as remote as some may think. The evidence indicates that those who held churches in their homes took major leadership. Paul wrote to Philemon, as head of the church in his home (Philemon 1:2). Paul held in high regard Prisca and Aquila who held churches in their homes (I Corinthians 16:19). Thus, the possibility that Chloe was a leader of worship and one who preached can be taken seriously. And of course her leadership in the church is evident by the fact that Paul names her at all.

Another indication that women were vocal in the Corinthian congregation may be found in I Corinthians 11:2-16.

I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head--it is the same as if her head were shaven. Verses 2-5

The remainder of the passage deals with further discussion of proper appearance and relationships. There are many issues that could be discussed in relation to this passage and many articles have been written on this passage. (Please see the bibliography for several references.) The reason for referring to it is the clear and simple assumption it makes: women DO prophesy in the community. The issue



in the passage has more to do with a person's head covering than with who will prophesy. Attention is also given to the relationship between women and men which are issues that are time and culture bound. It is quite clear that no exception is made for women, nor is it anything unusual for women to prophesy. So we can see that women were vocal and active in particular at Corinth and elsewhere in Greece as well.

This passage is in the context of a larger discourse on worship. Of women and worship in the Pauline communities, Gilbert says: "...there is not, in connection with any one of these women who labored with Paul in the Gospel, a single indication that the apostle debarred them from participating in public worship."<sup>11</sup>

#### WOMEN IN ASIA

We now turn to women in Asia. In Colossians 4:15 we find: "Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house."

It cannot be clearly ascertained from the passage the location of Nympha's house church. However, it appears that the three communities of Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis shared Paul's letters and perhaps other interests. It is quite likely then that Nympha may have lived in Hierapolis or in the surrounding area.

The issue of name and gender of Nympha has not always found

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<sup>11</sup>George Gilbert, "Women in Public Worship in the Churches of Paul," Biblical World, II (1893), 43.

agreement. Ancient scribes had difficulty with the idea that a woman led a house church and so they changed Nympha to the masculine Nymphas. There are some translators today who still use the masculine name. Metzger's commentary on the Greek New Testament addresses this problem.

The uncertainty of the gender of the name led to variation in the following possessive pronoun between αὐτῆς and αὐτοῦ . On the basis chiefly of (some evidence) Origen, the Committee preferred Νύμφαν ... αὐτῆς . The reading with αὐτῶν arose when copyists included ἀδελφούς in the reference.<sup>12</sup>

We see, then, that the standard accepted translation is Nympha, being feminine.

Nympha is singled out and mentioned among others who are significant within the communities in Asia. We cannot take lightly either her leadership in conducting a house church or the fact that she was listed in the concluding remarks of Colossians. It is not absolutely certain then, but highly likely that in her leadership role she engaged in preaching.

Another woman mentioned in Asia is Apphia. Philemon 1:2, "To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house." Apphia is listed among those who are greeted at the church at the house of Philemon. Some have suggested that she is Philemon's wife or sister, which is certainly possible. It is noteworthy that Paul refers to her as "OUR sister Apphia." This suggests a different kind of relationship.

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<sup>12</sup>Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 627.

It suggests a kind of Christian unity which is being expressed. If she were truly related to either one of them, it is likely that the relationship would have been expressed. (For example, greet your sister, or your wife.) It is possible she is a prominent member of the community, deserving special greeting. Leonard Swidler proposes that she was a leader in that house church.<sup>13</sup> As with Nympha, it is likely she preached as part of her involvement in the community.

### WOMEN IN MACEDONIA

All three of the women in this section are from the church at Philippi. We will first look at Lydia as found in Acts 16:13-15.

And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul. And when she was baptized, with her household, she besought us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

Here we have the account of Lydia's conversion along with her household. She is reported to be the first convert on European soil. She was apparently a wealthy woman. This is evident from the fact that she was a seller of purple and also that she had a household which was baptized with her. Evidently this was the small group which was the beginning of the church at Philippi. W. Derek Thomas makes a case in his article that women had no rights to form a church in Judaism and therefore found Christianity liberating in that they could form

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<sup>13</sup>Swidler, p. 296.

a church.<sup>14</sup>

I find the evidence for this split between Judaism and Christianity unconvincing and it is difficult for me to believe either that Judaism was so restrictive, or that Christianity was so liberating. However, the evidence in the passages does indicate that Lydia was a convert and was instrumental in forming a church in her home. She was probably quite active in the church as well. She continued to accomodate Paul and his companions on their travels, as seen in Acts 16:40. Thomas makes the point that the Epistle makes no hint of exclusion of women in it. I would add it doesn't include them either. I am not sure either statement helps us much in determining the make up and role of women in that community. The beginning of the letter to the Philippians sends greetings to all the saints...with the bishops and deacons. This church flourished and grew, and if women were as prominent at its inception as they seem to have been, women may have been included in this latter category of church leaders. Whatever her status, Lydia was obviously important to Paul and to the community at Philippi as she gave them their start with her leadership and by providing a place of worship for the new church.

Also related to the church at Philippi were two women, Euodia and Syntyche. In Philippians 4:2-4 Paul entreats the two women to agree in the Lord. He continues, "And I ask you also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they have labored side by side with me in the gospel

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<sup>14</sup>Derek Thomas, "The Place of Women at the Church at Philippi," Expository Times, LXXXIII (1972) 117-118.

together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life." We do not know the nature of the disagreement between the two women, but two things are significant. One is that these two women were prominent enough in the community for Paul to be concerned about a disagreement between them.

"It was evidently threatening the unity and well-being of the church and probably related to questions of belief, worship or the interpretation of the Christian ethic, and if this were the case then it means that these two women were expressing their views in the church."<sup>15</sup>

We must therefore deduce that their struggle affected the whole church and was worthy of mention in a letter to the whole community. The other significant thing is his reference to them as being among the fellow workers. There seemed to be an elect category of persons who were co-workers or fellow workers with Paul and he expected the church to be obedient to them and give them respect. (I Corinthians 16:16) Furnish suggests that "This ought not to be shrugged off as 'just a case of two bickering women' and used as the basis for another 'Ladies aid joke.' Paul believes it to be a serious matter for the whole congregation."<sup>16</sup>

Mr. Thomas goes further and focuses on word usage. The verb "athleo" meant

"to contend; as the athlete strained every muscle to achieve victory in the games. So, with equal dedication these women had contended with all zeal for the victory of the Gospel at Philippi."..."they had contended with the Apostle in the cause of the Gospel and had gained a position of such influence as to make their present

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<sup>15</sup>Thomas, p. 118.

<sup>16</sup>Victor Furnish, The Moral Teaching of Paul (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 104.

conflict a risk to the wellbeing of the church."<sup>17</sup>

There is much we do not know about Euodia and Syntyche, the substance of their dispute and their particular role in the community. It is significant that Paul made no attempt to quiet them or suppress their activities. If women were to be silent in the churches, it seems to me he would have appealed to that "logic" to stop the conflict. Rather his goal was reconciliation between two important women of the church.

Gilbert sums it up this way,

"...of the five people named at Philippi, three are women. Are we to suppose that these three were silent when the little band of believers came together for conference and prayer? Were they prominent in the Christian works of Philippi and dumb before the Lord? Did they stand side by side with Clement and Paul in Gospel work, and yet not share with them in the social weekly worship?"<sup>18</sup>

#### WOMEN IN ITALY

A major figure is Junia who is mentioned in Romans 16:7 by Paul in his greetings. "Greet Andronicus and Junia(s), my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners; they are notable among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me."

The first issue that must be dealt with is whether the name of the apostle is Junia or Junias. The Revised Standard Version translates it "Junias" even though the Greek does not indicate this translation. The translators could not imagine a woman could be an

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<sup>17</sup>Thomas, p. 119.

<sup>18</sup>Gilbert, p. 40.

apostle and therefore declared her to be male. Bernadette Brooten's article<sup>19</sup> on Junia makes a case for Junia being the name of a woman. Her main thesis is that there is no evidence at all for the usage of the name Junias in antiquity, whereas there is evidence aplenty for the use of the name Junia. Further, commentators up until the 13th century all translated it as Junia.

"Greet Andronicus and Junia...who are outstanding among the apostles." (Romans 16:7): To be an apostle is something great. But to be outstanding among the apostles--just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! They were outstanding on the basis of their works and virtuous actions. Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of this title of apostle. John Chrysostom (344/54-407)<sup>20</sup>

~~It is evident that the generations closer in time to the life of~~ Junia wrote as if it were common knowledge she were a woman. Brooten's article is convincing and is supported by others such as Swidler and Furnish.

A related question then is how do we understand the term apostle? Schüssler Fiorenza wrote a helpful article saying essentially that there are several understandings of the word apostle, depending on which time frame one refers to. She points out there are three criteria for apostleship as found in the New Testament.

1. Apostle must be witness of the resurrection.
2. Apostles must be witnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus.
3. Apostles must be sent to missionary work and exhibit the charisms necessary for this work.

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<sup>19</sup>Bernadette Brooten, "Junia...Outstanding Among the Apostles," in Swidler and Swidler, pp. 141-143.

<sup>20</sup>Brooten, p. 141.

"Schüssler Fiorenza classifies Junia in the third category of Apostles, that of missionary apostles. "Andronicus and Junia, mentioned in Romans 16:7, fulfill these criteria of Pauline apostleship. They had become Christians even before Paul and they had suffered prison for their missionary activity. They probably were Hellenistic Jews who had become highly respected among the apostles and are fellow prisoners of Paul."<sup>21</sup>

As we have seen in the New Testament writings, missionary activity included public preaching so as to convert people to the new faith. Junia, being an apostle, must have preached and traveled about as she did. She preceded Paul in the faith and seems to command a great deal of respect from Paul as he sends his greetings to her. Brooten concludes with this:

From this and from Paul's description of his own apostolic work in his letters, we can assume that the apostles Junia and Andronicus were persons of great authority in the early Christian churches, and that, just as with Paul, their apostleship had begun with a vision of the risen Lord and the charge to become apostles of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Coming from Rome also, were Prisca along with her husband Aquila. They are mentioned six times in Acts and the Epistles. "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks; greet also the church in their house." (Romans 16:3-5)

Prisca and Aquila are held in high esteem by Paul, and evidently did something for Paul for which he was extremely grateful.

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<sup>21</sup>"Schüssler Fiorenza, p. 137.

<sup>22</sup>Brooten, p. 143.



He makes a strong statement when he says that all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks for them. He also makes reference to the church in their house. From this short passage, then, we get a picture of two very significant people who have impacted the lives of many people in several churches, including their own.

We discussed earlier the active role which we presume the hosts of house churches to have taken. It is quite evident in the case of Prisca and Aquila that this is true.

Paul used the expression "fellow workers" frequently to refer to those whom he held in high regard and with authority. In I Corinthians 16:16 Paul writes "I urge you to be subject to such ones and to every fellow worker and laborer." In Romans 16, Paul called Prisca and Aquila his fellow workers, and we see here just what kind of authority Paul expects to be given to the fellow workers.

We must note that of the six times that Prisca and Aquila are mentioned, she is mentioned first four of those times. We already noted Romans above. There is also II Timothy 4:19 "Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus." There are several instances from Acts: 18:2, "And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome." Acts 18:18, "After this Paul stayed many days longer, and then took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila." Acts 18:26, "...but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him..." and I Corinthians 16:19 "The churches of Asia send greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord."

Gryson comments, "She must have been the dominant personality in this marriage, and John Chrysostom may be close to the truth when he attributes to her the whole merit of having instructed Apollos correctly in Christian doctrine."<sup>23</sup>

This reference comes from the account in Acts 18:24-28.

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

This certainly stands in stark contrast to the Deutero-Pauline passage in I Timothy declaring that women are not permitted to teach. It is obvious that Prisca took major leadership in teaching Apollos so that he might preach in a more correct way. I cannot imagine that Prisca's sex was at issue as she was teaching and preaching to Apollos. Rather her fervor and commitment as a laborer in the Gospel is what counted.

Gilbert also mentions the incident with Apollos:

"It appears from these passages that Priscilla, no less than Aquila, was an instructor of one of the most prominent preachers of the Apostolic Age; that Priscilla, no less than Aquila, gathered and conducted the church which was in their house in Corinth, and also the church which was in their house in Rome; and that Priscilla no less than Aquila, was a fellow-worker with Paul, who was known among all the gentile churches, and who had laid them all under

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<sup>23</sup>Gryson, pp. 4-5.

obligation to herself."<sup>24</sup>

Here is a woman who was involved in missionary travel, and undoubtedly preached the word as she went. She held house churches in her home, and was involved in a teaching ministry. Being a synergos, co-worker, in the gospel with Paul is another indication of prominent leadership in the early community. We cannot imagine that she was an invisible supporter, but rather one who was quite forceful in the spreading of the Gospel.

These aforementioned women are those found in the New Testament who seemed to be involved in preaching and prophetic ministries. Indeed there are many more women in the New Testament who rendered invaluable ministries as part of the church. All of these women represent a broad spectrum of situations and possibilities in early church leadership.

Leaving our geographical distinctions, there is one other dimension to examine in light of this topic: the order of widows. No single woman is mentioned by name, but rather a whole order. From I Timothy 5:3-16 we find some very explicit instructions about the order of widows.

Honor widows who are real widows. If a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. She who is a real widow, and is left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day; whereas she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. Command this, so that they may be without reproach. If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of

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<sup>24</sup>Gilbert, p. 41.

age, having been the wife of one husband; and she must be well attested for her good deeds, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, relieved the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way. But refuse to enroll younger widows; for when they grow wanton against Christ they desire to marry, and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge. Besides that, they learn to be idlers, gadding about from house to house, and not only idlers but gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, rule their households and give the enemy no occasion to revile us. For some have already strayed after Satan. If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her assist them; let the church not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are real widows.

What may appear at the outset to be a guideline for families and for dealing with their elderly, we now find to be a guideline for those aspiring to be widows in the order. The author makes a distinction between a real widow and others. He outlines personal characteristics that would be presupposed for those who wish to be widows. It is also interesting to note that the widows must enroll, and there are stringent qualifications for those who enroll. Some of those qualifications are: she has set her hope on God, that she continues in supplications and prayers night and day, that she must have done good deeds, shown hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, and relieved the afflicted, doing good in every way.

There seem to be specific duties that a widow was to perform. One notices that these duties are very pastoral in nature. It is also interesting that there was concern that the widows would gossip, or be idlers and busybodies. They were obviously involved with the lives of many people. There is a good deal of material on the order of widows and much more can be learned about its later development by looking at some later sources. I will therefore provide a brief excursus on the

later development of the order of widows for it sheds light upon our New Testament reference here.

## EXCURSUS ON THE LATER DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORDER OF WIDOWS

Hippolytus, a Roman Bishop in the latter part of the second century, wrote about the order of widows in the Apostolic Tradition. This work was put out by the anti-pope and martyr St. Hippolytus in the second decade of the third century and dealt with the rites and organization of the church.

"When a widow is appointed, she shall not be ordained but she shall be appointed by the name. If her husband has been long dead, she may be appointed (without delay). But if her husband has died recently, she shall not be trusted; even if she is aged she must be tested by time, for often the passions grow old in those who yield to them.

The widow shall be appointed by the word alone and (so) she shall be associated with the other widows; hands shall not be laid upon her because she does not offer the oblation nor has she a sacred ministry...the widow is appointed for prayer, and prayer is the duty of all.<sup>25</sup>

It is interesting that there is so much written on the role of the widows. It appears that there may have been controversy about the limitations of their functions. It is interesting to read the chapter on widows in the Didascalia Apostolorum,<sup>26</sup> for if we reconstruct who the widows were on the basis of the injunctions given them, they must have been a fiesty, assertive, gregarious, group! Following is just a sampling of what is found:

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<sup>25</sup>Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (London: S.P.C.K., 1968), XI, 1-5.

<sup>26</sup>The Didascalia Apostolorum was written in Syria in the first half of the third century. Most of the original Greek was lost, but a Syriac version from the beginning of the fourth century and some fragments of a Latin version from the end of the fourth century are extant. The Didascalia was used as a source in the first six books of the Apostolic Constitutions.

"And when she is asked a question by anyone, let her not straightway give an answer, except only concerning righteousness and faith in God; but let her send them that desire to be instructed to the rulers. And to those who question them let them (the widows) make answer only in refutation of idols and concerning the unity of God...<sup>27</sup>

And because they are gossips and chatterers and murmurers, they stir up quarrels; and they are bold and shameless.<sup>28</sup>

So in like manner the ears of such widows' hearts are stopped, because they will not sit beneath the roof of their houses and pray and entreat the Lord, but are impatient to be running after gain; and by their chattering they execute the desires of the Enemy.<sup>29</sup>

You then who are such ought to be ashamed; for you wish to be wiser and to know better, not only than the men, but even than the presbyters and the bishops. Know then, sisters, that whatsoever the pastors with deacons command you, and you obey them, you obey God; and with whomsoever you communicate by the command of the bishop, you are without blame before God; and so is every brother of the laity who obeys the bishop and submits to him; ...But if you obey not the mind of the bishops and deacons, they indeed will be quit of your offences, but you shall render an account of all that you do of your own will, whether men or women.<sup>30</sup>

It is rather clear from I Timothy and from the Didascalia that the structure of the office of Widows was not agreed upon by all parties. It certainly appears that the women were involved in much more than the men of authority would have them. It appears that the widows took on authority, perhaps authority to preach, to counsel, to baptize, etc. If these women were not so engaged, why would it be necessary to make these prohibitions?

In regard to the last quote from the Didascalia Apostolorum, I wonder if the women were raising questions about discrimination. The

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<sup>27</sup> Didascalia Apostolorum (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929), XV, iii, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Didascalia, XV, iii, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Didiscalia, XV, iii, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Didiscalia, XV, iii, 8.

author makes a point in saying that all the brothers of the laity must obey the bishop, and that all must account for their actions whether men or women. This evidence suggests that there may have been a "movement" of women, or at least that they had an identity which had some real strength. The language is extreme, both in canonical and in extra-canonical writings.

In the notes on *The Apostolic Tradition* by Hippolytus, Easton comments that

"(The deaconesses), except that they have no part in the liturgy, correspond in all respects to the deacons, and so naturally receive an ordination, while the 'widows' are merely 'named.' So, before the distinction was established, ordination of (all?) widows was presumably fairly usual; otherwise the rigour of Hippolytus' protest is difficult to explain.<sup>31</sup>

Based on the canonical evidence alone Gryson does not believe there was any particular ordained function that the widows had, although he believes they were useful to the church. It may be that the order of widows grew in size and power as time went on, causing the furor it seems to have evoked in later writings.

To conclude this chapter we can summarize that based on primary evidence in the New Testament and seeing the later development and reflections, women were in fact active participants in the early church. This active participation included significant leadership and it included preaching the word and prophesying in public gatherings of the community and in worship. Women were apostles; women taught and women were a part of the orders as they began to develop and were reflected

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<sup>31</sup>Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (Cambridge: Archon Books, 1962), p. 83.



in later writings.

All too often we quit our search at the point of hearing what others had to say about the role of women, rather than looking beyond those words to the actual activity of those women, be it by direct evidence or by implication based on what the men wrote.

Clearly I make no case for Christianity being a haven for feminists. The major case I make is that regardless of what some writers might have wished were happening, women were preaching, prophesying, leading and teaching in the early church.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## WOMEN AS PREACHERS IN OTHER EARLY CHRISTIAN SOURCES

Thus far, the focus of this paper has been discerning evidence for our topic in canonized scripture. Gleaning these incidences from our canon and examining them more closely is an important endeavor. However, there is a wealth of material which was not canonized yet still is useful for the project. This chapter will look at some of these sources as further evidence for women preaching in the early church. With the discovery of new material in recent years (such as the Nag Hammadi Library and other compilations added to the literature already available) we see that the early church was not a smooth homogeneous community without struggle. Rather we see conflict and discord similar to what we find in the church today. It is important then, to study the literature that reflects that struggle and which brings more clarity to the material which was canonized. Stressing the importance of such works, Altaner says "The Fathers were often greatly stimulated by their opponents, whose influence played a considerable part in solving their problems."<sup>1</sup> By examining all the dimensions of the early church, we may perceive more clearly the larger picture.

Some of the people who will be discussed in this chapter were part of movements deemed heretical by the church. They are included as being representative, nevertheless, of activity of women at that time.

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<sup>1</sup>Berthold Altaner, Patrology (New York: Herder and Herder, 1980), pp. 1-2.

It has been suggested that the greater involvement of women in these heretical movements may have had something to do with their status as heretical. (Montanism, sometimes called the New Prophecy, is a case in point.) Since most of the original writings were destroyed we must hypothesize about their beliefs and practice based upon the polemics of their opponents. Tertullian and Eusebius, for example, are our only real sources of information on such movements like the New Prophecy and Marcionism. Other extra-canonical works, such as the Acts of Paul (one portion of which includes the Acts of Paul and Thecla) were never deemed heretical. While they were included in earlier forms of the canon, they were not included in the final canonization of Scripture by the church.

#### THECLA

The first incident of a woman preaching or prophesying for consideration is Thecla.<sup>2</sup> The story of Thecla can be found within the Acts of Paul as compiled in the New Testament Apocrypha.<sup>3</sup> The author, date and place of origin for the Acts of Paul are not easily determined, nor is there unanimity on the subject. According to Schneemelcher, the author is indeed the presbyter in Asia Minor referred to by Tertullian.

If those who read the writings that falsely bear the name of Paul adduce the example of Thecla to maintain the right of women to teach and to baptize, let them know that the presbyter in Asia who produced this document, as if he could of himself add anything to the prestige

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<sup>2</sup>Sometimes spelled Thekla.

<sup>3</sup>New Testament Apocrypha, ed. Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964).

of Paul, was removed from his office after he had been convicted and had confessed that he did it out of love for Paul.<sup>4</sup>

The presbyter's frequent references to and knowledge of Asia Minor could corroborate the theory that he was from Asia Minor. It is quite likely the author gathered together the various oral traditions he heard and committed them to writing, in an attempt to be faithful to Paul. While he may have been fired from his office, he was not apparently asked to leave the church.<sup>5</sup>

The date of this work is uncertain. In the New Testament Apocrypha the date is given as between 185 and 195 a.d., noting that Tertullian knew of it as well as Eusebius and others who referred to it in their writings. There are some who date the Acts of Paul earlier. Ramsay, a nineteenth century scholar, puts forth the theory that there was an early version of the story of Thecla, as early as 50-70 a.d. followed by a later one, developed in the first century.

Dennis MacDonald puts forth a very interesting theory that the writer of the Pastoral Epistles knew of the Acts of Paul and Thecla, and that in fact the Pastoral Epistles were written as objections to the role women took as teachers, missionaries and preachers.<sup>6</sup> This idea is certainly worthy of much more discussion. MacDonald raises the possibility that the Acts of Paul and Thecla may have been composed

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<sup>4</sup>Tertullian, "DeBaptismo," 17, in Tertullian's Treatises (New York: MacMillan, 1919).

<sup>5</sup>New Testament Apocrypha, II, 351.

<sup>6</sup>Dennis MacDonald, "Virgins, Widows and Paul in Second Century Asia Minor," Society of Biblical Literature, Seminar Paper, No. 16 (1979).

late in the second century, shortly before Tertullian's reference to it. The stories themselves might have been told much earlier.

While the church did not finally canonize the Acts of Paul, neither did it declare them to be heretical. In time, they came to be viewed as somewhere between the canonized scripture and the heretical works. While we must recognize the romantic element in the story of Paul and Thecla, there is evidence of an historical person Thecla and the events surrounding her as well. Briefly, her story is as follows:<sup>7</sup>

Thecla was a young woman living in Iconium, betrothed to a wealthy young man named Thamyris. She was sitting by her window one day and heard Paul speak. Paul had come to Iconium, and was staying with Onesiphorus. Thecla was entranced with the preaching of Paul, particularly about the role of virginity in hearing and proclaiming the Word. Thecla would not listen to her mother or her fiance who beseeched her to turn away from Paul, and she remained fixed on Paul. Thamyris went down to find out more about Paul and his teachings, with the intent of finding grounds for bringing charges against him. Thamyris took Paul before the governor on the charge that he was dissuading maidens from marriage. Paul was sent to Prison. Thecla stole out of her home in order to see Paul and was found at his feet in the prison. They were both taken to court and Paul was sent out of the city. Thecla's mother asked that her daughter be burned at the stake as a warning to other young maidens who might do something similar, and the governor complied and ordered her burned at the stake. She was tied to the stake

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<sup>7</sup>New Testament Apocrypha, II, 353-364.

and the fire was lit. At that moment, dark clouds appeared and a huge storm broke out and Thecla escaped.

While this was happening, Paul and Onesiphorus were on their way to Daphne and they took refuge in a tomb where Paul continued to be in prayer for Thecla. They sent a boy back to Iconium to get food and he saw Thecla and enabled her to join Paul. She asked Paul to baptize her, but he refused saying "be patient, and she should receive the washing." They went on to Antioch where Alexander the Syriarch tried to assault her. Paul did not take responsibility for her and on her own she refused the Syriarch and drove him away. The Syriarch was angered and brought her before the Roman governor, who condemned her to be cast to wild beasts.

The women of the city were outraged. For her protection the governor put her in the care of Tryphaena, a widow, queen and kinswoman of the emperor. She had lost her own daughter earlier. The day came for her encounter with the wild beasts. During a procession, they tied Thecla to the back of a lioness which, to the amazement of all who watched, only licked Thecla's feet. Thecla went back to the home of Tryphaena, who now was quite interested in the fate of Thecla. Tryphaena had a dream in which her departed daughter appeared to her saying: "Mother, let Thecla be to thee in my stead, that through her prayers I may pass to the place of the righteous."

Thecla offered prayers of intercession for the daughter. They came again to take Thecla back to face more wild beasts. By this time Tryphaena was very attached to Thecla and was dismayed at the proceedings, and so would not let them take her. However, after a

written order was secured, the proceedings went on.

They took Thecla, stripped her and let loose bears, lions, and the lioness of the previous day. The same lioness protected Thecla against the other animals and fought to her death to protect Thecla. When the lioness died, and the other animals were ready to attack, Thecla noticed a pond with seals in it. She jumped into this pond saying, "The time is come for me to wash myself, in the name of Jesus Christ at my last day I baptize myself." The seals floated up dead and she was kept from death.

In the meantime, Tryphaena had fainted, and the governor fearing she was dead, called a halt to the event, realizing it was beyond control. On being interrogated, Thecla preached her faith.

Thecla went home with Tryphaena and continued to preach the word and Tryphaena's whole household was convinced of the faith. Hearing that Paul was at Myra in Lycia, Thecla disguised herself as a man and went to that city. She told Paul and the others what had happened and about her baptizing herself. Paul said "Go and teach the word of God." Thecla went back to Iconium to visit the house of Onesiphorus and then to see her mother. She then left for Seleucia where she "enlightened many and died in peace."

There are many translations of the story which had wide circulation. There were a few minor variations of details in the story, but they all have the same basic content.

There are several notable items in this story. One item of interest is the predominance of women. There is Thecla, her mother, Tryphaena, Tryphaena's daughter, and all the women who protested

Thecla's sentence. Dennis MacDonald suggests this may be an indication that women were the ones who kept the story alive by telling it again and again.<sup>8</sup> This has implications for our understanding of the role of women in carrying on the traditions. MacDonald suggests further that it may have been the widows who kept the story alive, and that is why there were admonitions for women to keep silent and to not teach in the Pastoral Epistles. There are also specific admonitions to the widows to not tell tales.

A second item of interest is that Thecla is the main character of the story even though it is in the context of the Acts of Paul. As the main character she participates in major leadership roles: 1) She travels freely and each time alone, in order to spread the word or catch up with the others. 2) She preaches in several settings and converts persons to Christianity. 3) She baptizes not only herself, but others as well. 4) She is commissioned by Paul to go and teach.

Of further interest, one may note the picture of Paul which is found in this account stands in sharp contrast to the picture of him portrayed in the Pastoral Epistles. In the latter he is reported to have told women to keep silent and to not teach. This paper is not a treatise on Paul, and so we will not discuss the various possibilities regarding Paul's attitudes. This is a fascinating area for further work, and Dennis MacDonald has some fresh ideas on the matter.

The fact that the Acts of Paul and Thecla was not deemed

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<sup>8</sup>His further point is that the author of the Pastoral Epistles may have been silencing women because they were the keepers of the oral tradition.



heretical and was well known in many languages and over a long period of time suggests that women may have been more active in the leadership of the early church than heretofore accepted. Ramsay even suggests, albeit a disputed theory, that

the objectional features of the tale could be explained away; and attention was directed more to features of the tale which were more in accordance with the spirit of later Catholicism. Finally, in process of time, the objectionable features were toned down and eliminated, so that in the extant MSS not a single trace remains of Thecla's administering the rite of baptism to others.<sup>9</sup>

If we refer back<sup>9a</sup> to Tertullian's quote it is quite apparent that Thecla was indeed baptizing persons other than herself. Women appealed to Thecla for their authority to do the same, as indicated by the following statement by Tertullian, "I mean the example of Thecla-- in support of women's freedom to teach and baptize..."<sup>10</sup>

This story of Thecla, preserved over centuries, gives us a glimpse of the extent of the involvement of women in the early church. The evidence shows that Thecla was indeed well known and respected. Her influence was such that women appealed to her for their authority to baptize and to teach. Thecla was a woman who traveled, who made her own decisions, who taught, baptized and preached. There were those during that time who opposed her or any woman who responded to the call of Christ in their lives. The admonitions against women's participation in the church as found in the Pastoral Epistles may have been such

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<sup>9</sup>W. M. Ramsay, The Church in the Roman Empire (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), pp. 375-376.

<sup>9a</sup>See above, pp. 45-46.

<sup>10</sup>Tertullian, "De Baptismo," 17.

opposition. We see continued opposition today in the church. It is uplifting for women today to know that even back in the first century women were preaching the word.

There is further evidence of Thecla's influence in other forms such as inscriptions and art work. Some titles for her include "apostle." During the Patristic and medieval times, "Holy Thecla, Proto-Martyr and Apostle" was found in iconography. Her story was kept alive through the Middle Ages. Only recently has her saint day, along with others, been removed from the Catholic calendar. Thecla was the model for the life of Saint Macrina, as told by Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century. The two women were held up together as models for evangelists.

#### THE NEW PROPHECY MOVEMENT

As was noted in the previous chapter, evidence indicates that women apparently had stronger leadership roles in Asia Minor than anywhere else at that time. Coming out of Asia Minor also was a movement that included women in its central leadership, the New Prophecy movement.

The New Prophecy was a movement which is commonly named after one of its key leaders, Montanus. It is called the New Prophecy in this paper because that is how the group referred to itself according to Eusebius: "Lately, however, having been at Ancyra, a city of Galatia, and having understood that the church in Pontus was very much agitated by this New Prophecy, as they call it..."<sup>11</sup> This movement

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<sup>11</sup>Eusebius Pamphili, Ecclesiastical History, V, 16, 4, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955).

appeared in the area of Phrygia, Asia Minor sometime around 165-170 a.d.

The basic doctrine held by the New Prophecy was that God's supernatural revelations did not end with the Apostles, but that more wonderful manifestations of the energy could be expected under the dispensation of the Paraclete. Montanus claimed to be used by the paraclete and consequently, his words were uttered and accepted as those of the Divine Being. The declaration of Heresy had less to do with their actual theology than with their frenetic practices, which included exaltation of martyrdom.

Our interest in this movement is, of course, the strong leadership taken by Maximilla and Priscilla. Most of our information comes from those who wrote against the New Prophecy, Eusebius in particular. This information was undoubtedly skewed to fit the particular bias of the author. However we can reconstruct their movement based on these writings.

Eusebius is commonly known among the ancients as Eusebius of Caesarea or Eusebius Pamphili. He was a Bishop Caesarea for many years. His birth is estimated around 260-264 and he became Bishop in 313. He is the only source of much of our history of his time. From his writings, we learn about the New Prophecy. Referring to Montanus he writes:

For he excited two others, females, and filled them with the spirit of delusion, so that they also spake like the former, in a kind of ecstatic frenzy, out of all season, and in a manner strange and novel, whilst the spirit of evil congratulated them, thus rejoicing and inflated by him, and continued to puff them up the more, by promises of great things.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Eusebius, v. 16, 10.

One can see that there must have been great controversy surrounding the New Prophecy with people supporting it and people opposing it. In quoting the anonymous antimontanist source Eusebius asserts that the holy bishops of that time attempted to refute the spirit in Maximilla, but were prevented by others who manifestly cooperated with the spirit. His statement is as follows: "And let not, as is said in the same work of Asterius Urbanus, let not the spirit of Maximilla say, 'I am chased like a wolf from the flock, I am no wolf. I am utterance, spirit, and power.'"<sup>13</sup>

One of those who wrote against the New Prophecy movement was Hippolytus, Bishop of Rome. Although he was writing against the movement he does include reference to the women as preachers and leaders:

These have been rendered victims of error from being previously captivated by (two) wretched women, called a certain Priscilla and Maximilla, whom they supposed (to be) prophetesses. And they assert that into these the Paraclete Spirit had departed; and antecedently to them, they in like manner consider Montanus as prophet...They introduce, however, the novelties of fasts, and feasts, and meals of parched food, and repasts of radishes, alleging that they have been instructed by women.<sup>14</sup>

Even though Hippolytus was writing a treatise against the activities and beliefs of the group he certainly confirms the extent to which women led the movement. It may be significant that the women are mentioned first in this passage and Montanus is mentioned later and in relation to them.

The high degree of participation by women is confirmed again

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<sup>13</sup>Eusebius, V, 16, 17.

<sup>14</sup>Hippolytus, "Refutation of All Heresies," VIII, 12, in Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh: Clark, 1868), VI.

in the letter of Jerome to Ctesiphon:

Montanus, that mouthpiece of an unclean spirit, used two rich and high born ladies Prisca and Maximilla first to bribe and then to pervert many churches.<sup>15</sup>

The names of Priscilla and Maximilla occur frequently in the writings about the New Prophecy. Their leadership role in the movement seems to have been central and crucial. There are some who suggest that Priscilla and Maximilla were the real leaders.

In a footnote in one volume of Eusebius' history the editor notes

Maximilla and Priscilla were greatly revered by the Montanists, who in many localities were called, after the latter, Priscillianists. The Montanists insisted on the complete religious equality of men and women. Human beings were but instruments of the Spirit, who might choose anyone, a man or woman, ignorant or learned, as his mouthpiece.<sup>16</sup>

It is quite apparent that women were leaders in this movement. While some scholars may refer to Priscilla and Maximilla as Montanus' helpers, the polemics against the movement show that it is highly likely that the women were at least co-equals with Montanus and perhaps surpassed him in the tasks of preaching, interpreting and leadership. Desoyres states that "Hippolytus makes out Maximilla and Priscilla the real leaders, and suppresses Montanus altogether, VIII. 19."<sup>17</sup>

Some of the sayings of Priscilla and Maximilla are quoted by

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<sup>15</sup>Jerome to Ctesiphon, "Letter" CXXXIII, 4, in a select library of The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), VI.

<sup>16</sup>Eusebius V, 13 in Fathers of the Church (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1952), 315.

<sup>17</sup>John DeSoyres, Montanism and the Primitive Church (Cambridge: Keystone, 1878; reprint 1965), p. 34.

the church fathers and are collected in the New Testament Apocrypha.<sup>18</sup>

A sampling follows:

8. (The Spirit speaks:) Desire not to die in bed, nor in delivery of children, nor by enervating fever, but in martyrdom, that He may be glorified who has suffered for you. (Tertullian, *de Fuga* IX. 4; cf. Tertullian, *de Anima* LV. 5).

10. (The holy prophetess Prisca proclaims:) A holy minister must understand how to minister holiness. For if the heart gives purification (?), says she, they will perceive saving voices, as clear as they were obscure. (Tertullian, *de Exhort. Cast.* X. 5.)

11. (Quintilla or Priscilla says:) In the form of a woman, says she, arrayed in shining garments, came Christ to me and set wisdom upon me and revealed to me that this place (=Pepuza) is holy and that Jerusalem will come down hither from heaven. (Epiphanius, *Haer.* 49.1. 2-3.)

14. (Maximilla says:) The Lord has sent me as adherent, preacher and interpreter of this affliction and this covenant and this promise; he has compelled me, willingly or unwillingly, to learn the knowledge of God. (Epiphanius, *Haer.* 48. 13. 1.)

13. (Maximilla says:) Listen not to me, but listen to Christ. (Epiphanius, *Haer.* 48. 12. 4.)

We see from these sayings that these women understood themselves to be called by God, even against their wills. They saw themselves as part of a prophetic tradition.

The amount of female imagery in these sayings is significant. In the eighth saying the Spirit refers to delivery of children. This assumes that women as well as men were expected to be called upon for martyrdom. Women were not exempt from the life of the church. In the eleventh saying Christ comes in the form of a woman. These two women seemed to understand themselves as being divinely called to preach and prophesy and their sex did not seem to be an issue.

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<sup>18</sup>These sayings are found in the New Testament Apocrypha, II, 687.

The scope of women's involvement is broadened by Eusebius when he is dealing with Militiades and his works.

He enumerates those who had prophesied under the New Testament. Among these he mentions one Ammia and Quadratus.... Neither will they be able to boast that Agabus, or Judas, or Silas, or the daughters of Philip, or Ammias in Philadelphia, or Quadratus, or others that do not belong to them, ever acted in this way....If after Quadratus and Ammias in Philadelphia, the women that followed Montanus succeeded in the gift of prophecy, let them show us what women among them succeeded Montanus and his women. For the apostle shows that the gift of prophecy would be in all the church until the coming of the Lord, but they can by no means show any one at this time, the fourteenth year from the death of Maximilla.<sup>19</sup>

Note that there were other women involved in the New Prophecy other than Priscilla and Maximilla. The author is trying to dispute the prophecies of the women based on the evidence that their prophecies did not come true, nor did any other women succeed them. Nevertheless, it is significant for our study here to simply note that these women were prominent leaders in the movement. The fact that there were some who identified themselves as Priscillianists is also significant.

Tertullian is an interesting figure in regard to the New Prophecy movement. He held firm the position that women ought not speak in the church. His position on women was that they must not engage in the activities of men. When he converted to the New Prophecy movement, one would think that he would change or soften his position with the influential involvement of Priscilla and Maximilla. However we see that this is not the case in the following quote by Tertullian:

We have now, amongst us a sister whose lot it has been to be favoured with certain gifts of revelation, which she experiences

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<sup>19</sup>Eusebius, V, 17, 2-4.

in the Spirit by ecstatic vision ("per ecstasin in spiritu,") amidst the sacred rites of the Lord's day in the church: she converses with angels, and sometimes even with the Lord; she both sees and hears mysterious communications (sacramenta), some men's hearts she understands, and to them who are in need she distributes remedies. Whether it be in the reading of the Scriptures, or in the chanting of Psalms, or in the preaching of sermons, or in the offering up of prayers, in all these religious services matter and opportunity are afforded to her of seeing visions. It may possibly have happened to us, whilst this sister of ours was rapt in the Spirit, that we had discoursed about the soul. After the people are dismissed at the conclusion of the services, she is in the habit of relating to us what things she may have seen in vision; for all her communications are most carefully examined, in order that they may be proved.<sup>20</sup>

It appears the only way Tertullian could approve of women's involvement was if it be done privately, and then with scrutiny.

A final aspect that is of significance in regard to the New Prophecy movement is that women appealed to other women for their authority to preach. While Origen attempted to refute this appeal to authority, his works are most valuable in preserving what the order was.

Those disciples of women, who chose as their master Priscilla and Maximilla, not Christ, the Spouse of the Bride...The Evangelist Philip, they say, has four daughters, and all prophesied...It is said that Deborah was a prophetess. Mary, the sister of Aaron, tambourine in hand, led the choir of women...(Hulda was a prophetess) ...The Gospel itself mentions a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser...When Mary, the prophetess spoke, she was leading a choir of women.<sup>21</sup>

Stressing this point further Dennis MacDonald adds:

Further evidence that women were influential in Christian Asia Minor comes from the frequent references to holy women of the past, like Thecla. For example, Priscilla and Maximilla justified

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<sup>20</sup>Tertullian, "De Anima" 9, 4, in Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), III.

<sup>21</sup>Origen, Fragment on I Corinthians, 74. Found in Roger Gryson, The Ministry of Women in the Early Church (Collegeville, MN: Order of St. Benedict, 1976), pp. 27-28.



their prophetic office by referring to Ammia of Philadelphia and the daughters of Philip. Likewise, Quintillians justified their female clergy by appealing to precedence in the daughters of Philip, in Miriam, Moses' prophesying sister, and even in Eve, since she was the first to eat of the tree of knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

MacDonald further states that "traditions about women were told in communities with differing theologies" and that these traditions were "sometimes used to legitimate women prophets and teachers (i.e., traditions about Eve, Miriam, Thecla, Ammia, and the daughters of Philip)." He further states that women themselves were important in carrying on the oral tradition and told the stories themselves.<sup>23</sup>

This is an important aspect to this paper. It was evidently significant for women to cite other women who had gone before them. We noted earlier that women appealed to Thecla for their authority to baptize. Now we see women appealing to a whole host of women for their authority to preach and teach. The need to recount those who have lived before is a strong one. We see that need expressed in Scripture in the geneologies, in the book of Hebrews, in the continual references made to all the ancestors of the faith. We see that sexual identity also plays a part in claiming that heritage. It was not enough to claim Paul, Peter, Abraham, and Jesus. It was important to appeal to Sarah, Miriam, Huldah, Deborah, and others as well.

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<sup>22</sup>MacDonald, p. 17. He is referring to Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* V, 17, 4 and Origen's Fragment on I Corinthians, 74, published in *Journal of Theological Studies*, X (1908-1909) 41-42. Also Epiphanius, *Panarion*, heresy 49, 2.

<sup>23</sup>MacDonald, p. 172.

## MARCIONITES

Marcionism is another heretical movement in which the leadership of women was valued and utilized. Marcionites were named after Marcion who wanted Christianity undefiled by association with Judaism. They saw Christianity purely as the New Covenant. The Old Testament was a scandal to the faithful and stumbling block to the refined and intellectual Gentiles because of its crudity and cruelty. In essence, they wanted only a New Testament Christianity, and it is easy to see why this perspective was deemed heretical. They were a strongly ascetic group and did not marry or procreate.

There was a strong dualism in their thinking which came about from the belief that there was one God for the Old Testament and one God for the New Testament. There were polemics written against them which maintained that there was only one God over all.

We learn something of the involvement of women among the Marcionites from the letter of Jerome to Ctesiphon: "Marcion sent a woman before him to Rome to prepare men's minds to fall into his snares. Apelles possessed in Philumena an associate in his false doctrines."<sup>24</sup>

The woman Marcion sent ahead was obviously on a preaching mission, preparing the way. Philumene was an ascetic virgin and prophet at Rome who was influential on Apelles who revised Marcion's ideas and founded a new sect.

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<sup>24</sup>Jerome to Ctesiphon, Letter CXXXIII, 4.

Eusebius was one of the persons who wrote against the Marcionites. It is clear from his polemic that women were very active in the Marcionite movement:

Therefore they were at variance even among themselves, maintaining inconsistent opinions. Apelles, one of their here, who prided himself on his life and old age, confesses one Principle (source of being, beginning or almost, God) but says that the prophecies (of the Old Testament) are from an opposing spirit, being won over to this view by the response of a possessed maiden by the name of Philoumene.<sup>25</sup>

There is evidence that indicates that the Marcionites organized themselves so that they had ecclesiastical orders. Tertullian wrote against Marcion and part of his treatise includes the following statement:

Let Marcion then exhibit, as gifts of his god, some prophets, such as have not spoken by human sense, but with the Spirit of God, such as have both predicted things to come, and have made manifest the secrets of the heart; let him produce a psalm, a vision, a prayer--only let it be the Spirit, in an ecstasy, that is, in a rapture, whenever an interpretation of tongues has occurred to him; let him show to me also, that any woman of boastful tongue in his community has ever prophesied from amongst those specially holy sisters of his.<sup>26</sup>

The phrase "those specially holy sisters of his" is of great interest. It is not possible to be sure what it refers to, but it does sound like it could have been an order of women.

The involvement of women in the hierarchy of the Marcionite movement is discussed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "We do not know much about the actual role of women in Marcion's church, but he is said to have appointed women to all church offices on an equal

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<sup>25</sup>Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, V, 13, 1-2.

<sup>26</sup>Tertullian, "Tertullian Against Marcion," V, 8, in Ante-Nicene Christian Library, VII.

basis with men."<sup>27</sup>

Elaine Pagels takes it further when she says "Marcion had, in fact, scandalized his orthodox contemporaries by appointing women on an equal basis with men as priests and bishops."<sup>28</sup> The evidence points quite clearly to strong female leadership in this movement. It moved beyond informality and into the realm of church office.

A group similar to the Marcionites were the Carpocratians. The Carprocratians distinguished between the unbegotten Father and God who gave the Law. They espoused libertinism, and believed persons were saved through faith and love.

Women were prominent in leadership roles in this group as well. Origen, a prolific writer and thinker, who was born in Alexandria about 185 a.d. wrote this:

Celsus knows, moreover, certain Marcellians, so called from Marcellina, and Harpocratians from Salome, and others who derive their name from Marianne, and others again from Martha.<sup>29</sup>

From this quote, it appears that a group was formed and named after Marcellina. It is also apparent that women were important in the leadership of this group.

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<sup>27</sup>Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Cultic Language in Qumran and in the New Testament," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, XXXVIII (1976), 45.

<sup>28</sup>Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 72. Beyond the scope of this paper but of related interest, is Pagels' assertion that there is a correlation between religious theory and social practice. This is a fascinating study in comparing the Gnostic with orthodox thought and practice.

<sup>29</sup>Origen, Origen Against Celsus, V, 62, in Ante-Nicene Christian Library, II.

Schüssler Fiorenza wrote further on the matter:

The Carpocratians appeal to Salome, Mary Magdalene and Martha as the source and guarantors of their traditions. One of their teachers, Marcellina, represented their teaching in Rome in the middle of the second century and acquired many followers there.<sup>30</sup>

We see our theme is carried through in several early groups. Women were clearly preaching, teaching, and in positions of leadership in each group we studied. Women were increasingly active in these movements about the time that we see fade the active participation of women in the orthodox structure of the emerging church. It is of great interest to this writer that women of the first and second centuries were consciously appealing to women who had gone before them for their authority to preach and lead. There are many factors that could yet be covered, but are outside the bounds of this paper. A good summary by Dennis MacDonald is

Perhaps we should now back away from our mosaic of fragmentary references and look at the larger picture. It is clear that women taught in Asia Minor congregations, and that their teaching was apparently confined to oral communication...we know that many of them prophesied and told holy stories.<sup>31</sup>

It is important to stress why we have gone beyond the canonized literature in dealing with this question. Our attempt is to look at the activity of women as we can best determine. We know that the different groups (orthodox and heretical) interacted with one another and were influenced by each other. By going beyond the final canonization. We see the larger scope of activity. There are many unanswered questions about women in the orthodox church and in the so-called heretical groups. For example, were these women active in the heretical

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<sup>30</sup>Schüssler Fiorenza, p. 46.

<sup>31</sup>MacDonald, p. 174.

movements because they were excluded from the emerging orthodox church? Were they involved in these groups because of the theologies? Does their participation signal the role of women in early Christianity which was later excluded from the canon? Surely there are more questions. Contained here however, is a remnant to which we can hold and claim as our own.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR THE CHURCH TODAY

The previous chapters serve as evidence of women in preaching and prophetic ministries at the time of Jesus and during the early development of the church. The attempt has been to lift up these women and bring them into better focus. Further work in this area would be beneficial in an expanded work with more Biblical and ancient language tools. For our purposes, the previous chapters do give an overall sense of the participation of women in the context of preaching.

There are several implications that arise from a study of this nature. Before listing those, however, we must look at the context in which we live. Any implications and conclusions developed as a result of this study must necessarily take into consideration the environment in which we minister.

### CONTEXT FOR ASSESSING IMPLICATIONS

The past decade has shown a dramatic increase of women enrolled in seminaries all across the nation. Statistics from the School of Theology at Claremont are indicative of the trend. In 1970 women enrolled in degree programs which lead to ordination comprised 2.8% of the student body. In 1975, 25.2 percent of the student body were women and in 1980, 39.7 percent were women.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>These statistics were provided by the Development Office of the School of Theology at Claremont.

Likewise, there has been an increase in the number of women who are members of the ordained clergy. Consequently, more and more pulpits are being filled by women. Following are statistics which show the upward trend of women's participation. Data gathered by the editor of the Yearbook of American Churches in 1977<sup>2</sup> indicate that out of 211 Christian religious bodies, 87 do not ordain women to the full ministry, 76 ordain women, 10 are in a special category (Latter-Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, Friends). There is no information on 38 bodies. The 76 bodies that do ordain women to the full ministry have an estimated inclusive membership of 47,408,214. They have 253-512 clergy and an estimated 10,470 women clergy or 4 per cent of total clergy.

A breakdown of this percent reveals that 31.8 percent are found in 14 Pentecostal bodies; 29.9 percent in three denominations organized on a para-military basis (i.e., Salvation Army, etc.); and 17.4 percent of women clergy are found in ten major Protestant denominations. The remaining 20 percent are scattered in a wide variety of Christian religious bodies.

Of the ten major Protestant denominations ordaining women to the full ministry only three--American Baptist Churches, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the United Church of Christ--began ordaining women prior to 1956. These three bodies account for 52 percent of the total women clergy in this category.

The growth of women in the ministry is charted below:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>"Women Ministers in 1977" (New York: NCCCUSA, 1978), 6-8.

<sup>3</sup>"Women Ministers in 1977," 5.



1910 - .5%	1940 - 2.3%	1970 - 2.9%
1920 - 1.4%	1950 - 4.1%	
1930 - 2.2%	1960 - 2.3%	

Experience has shown that even though our denomination (United Methodist) ordained the first woman in 1888 (Anna Howard Shaw) and voted full ordination rights to women in 1956, some clergy and laity still do not know that women may become members of the clergy. I have heard the following remarks on various occasions: "I didn't know the church allowed women ministers," or "It's just that I have never thought about a woman preacher before," or "It's not Biblical," or "Don't you know the Bible says women are to be silent?" Not only do clergy women feel they must struggle for their presence in the seminary, but then they are put in the position of justifying their very existence in the world. Women may feel like a blossoming tree without a trunk or without roots.

When one is denied an identity through a rightful heritage, personal power is undermined and one may be rendered less effective. Not only does the church become isolated from its heritage, but women are isolated from theirs as well.

A church which does not understand nor care about the full Biblical and historical picture will unconsciously (although sometimes consciously) exclude women from all cognitive thought, images, awarenesses, and self concept as a church. When we think of women in the ministry as something innovative, we rob ourselves of a very rich heritage, not just for women, but for the whole church.

Related to this is the question of authority. If the presence of women in the pulpit is seen as an abnormality, her authority is called

into question. Many women who preach know the experience of being carefully scrutinized by others.

An interesting case study on women in authority is shared by Thomas Troeger, professor of preaching and parish at Colgate Rochester/Besley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary.<sup>4</sup> The setting for the case study is a preaching class. A black woman delivered a somewhat prophetic sermon addressing racial issues and the ghetto to a racially mixed class with a white professor. She had previously given a sermon which was more nurturing in its content and style. After delivering her sermon, Katherine received much anger and hostility from class members. One student said:

I felt the sermon was an attack on the black men in this class when you mentioned the 'sacrifice' involved in preaching the gospel. Blacks have been sacrificing for too long, and it's time for them to be grabbing their share of the pie.

The discussion had little to do with the content of her sermon. This same student continued, "I am telling you, the sermon was an attack. I felt it as an attack."

Katherine later commented that they "weren't even talking about what I said. I sensed that, but I didn't know what was going on."

For the next class session, Troeger brought in a black preacher to help them reflect upon what happened. This minister had dealt with this kind of reaction in his own ministry, often having received virulent responses that were disproportionate to the sermon that set them off. He talked about "living through the pain of those reactions

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<sup>4</sup>Thomas H. Troeger, "We had to Sacrifice the Woman," Christian Century, XCVIII (February 4-11, 1981), 108, 124-126.

and trying to understand the deeper realities that had been hooked in his listeners."

One of the men responded, "Yes, I think some of that is true... I colluded with (another class member) and we became a little bit like a tribe, and we had to sacrifice the woman." In reflecting upon this, Troeger said, "I have certainly had people attack my preaching, but never have I received quite the irrational, petulant treatment that is sometimes given to women and that I observed firsthand in Katherine's case."

Troeger's analysis of the incident is predominantly Freudian in approach. To discuss his analysis would take us too far from the focus of this paper, but it should be examined critically.

Troeger may be correct in saying we must deal with more than language, liturgy and symbols. However, symbols (language is symbol) are very powerful forces in our lives. If we reflect upon the predominant images or symbols for women in the Judeo-Christian heritage, we find the temptress Eve or the virgin Mother Mary. In our understanding of our faith we have excluded those images of women which are strong in leadership and authority.

While I have not had such a dramatic experience as Katherine in the case study, I do know the experience. One explanation I would give is that a woman in the pulpit upsets our traditional understandings of authority and therefore women bear the brunt of disproportionate responses. Women who preach upset the "order of things." The people who hear a woman and respond inappropriately may be threatened by the heretofore unaccustomed power of a woman. Had our tradition

valued the contributions of women, such as those named in this paper, we might not be reading about case studies like the one mentioned above.

Related to the question of authority is the issue of Apostolic succession. Apostolic succession is the traditional way we have preserved the hierarchy of the church, and this hierarchy has been male. As was noted in previous chapters, Junia was attributed with the title of apostle. Thecla was referred to as an apostle. Mary Magdalene fits the qualifications for the title apostle. If we recognize women in the early church as having held significant leadership positions which led to their bearing the title apostle, what does that say about our concept of apostolic succession?

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH

With these contexts in mind, we can now examine some implications from the study. First, by understanding that God has always called women to preach the word, we will see that women are not an abnormality or a strange new graft on the "family tree." Women preachers stand in a long line of women who proclaimed the word of God with boldness. When people grasp that vision, the church must change in its self understanding.

Out of this more complete knowledge a new self understanding must necessarily grow, one of a full and inclusive heritage. Our heritage includes many women who were called to preach, and it goes far beyond the early church. Although we all may read the same Bible, it is astonishing that most people are surprised to discover the powerful women contained in it. There is a job of education to be done. Not only must we name these women, but also broaden our understanding

of their contexts and activities. As the church begins to really understand its rich heritage--the ways in which God has called a vast variety of people--it can then receive the right and profound work of God in its many contexts. For example, I was the first ordained woman to preach in a certain church. After the service, a man came up to me and said that before I spoke, he honestly believed that because I was a woman, I would have nothing to say to him or to his life. He found out that God calls and uses women as well, and that in fact he was touched by God through that sermon. We have perpetuated a male image of the preacher in the church. We have added to this image in every way, through publications, through our language, through curriculum and by being afraid to boldly proclaim the whole gospel. So, there is a benefit to the whole church by reclaiming our heritage.

The second implication is that clergywomen benefit greatly from knowledge of their foremothers in the faith. It is my observation and experience that clergywomen are looking for grounding in tradition. This comes not only from being challenged by others, but from an inner thirst and desire to be firmly rooted. The dynamic word of God as found throughout Scripture as well as in experience provides this grounding. If our female sex is to be made the issue then we must know more about who we are as women. Where have we come from? By what authority did my foremothers preach the Word?

For the women who were in seminary with me, information on women was like food to hungry people. It was like rain in the dry desert to grasp hands with women in ministry of previous centuries. It is a powerful experience to think about Anna in the temple day and

night, proclaiming the Messiah to the people. My identity as a woman who preaches is strengthened as I stand with Priscilla, Junia, Phoebe and Mary Magdalene. By recovering these pieces of our tradition, women are encouraged to stand fast by God's call upon our lives. To know that the daughters DID prophesy encourages us to do the same.

The key words here are rootedness and encouragement. While this study gives women a firm grounding in Biblical tradition, it is important to affirm that precedence of Biblical women is not a prerequisite for women to preach today. Even if a woman had never preached until the twentieth century, we would still need to affirm the continuing creative presence of God who calls us forward. The purpose of a study of this kind therefore is to call the church into being more faithful to the tradition we do have.

A third implication from this study for the church is that the early church was an affirmation of the wholeness of creation as expressed in Genesis 1:27 "...male and female (God) created them." In God's image we are created and in God's image we share in ministry. The very presence of women in the pulpit says more about the wholeness and vastness of God's creation than any sermon. We may talk about how God loves and calls each of us, but when we see that in actions, it becomes reality. Women in the churches I have served frequently have approached me and commented that it is so good for them to have a woman in the pulpit. First, it is an affirmation of them and their sexuality. Secondly, when I speak out of my experience, which is female, I speak to their experience as well, which has usually not been named heretofore in the pulpit. Their experiences as women are then lifted into the

realm of faith and life. Barbara Troxell discusses the advantages of both female and male persons in the ministry.

The greatest value in team ministry may well be the affirmation of wholeness and of liberation to which it points. Our creation, and the essential being of the Creator, were posited in unity... In our day the search and struggle continues for creative unification, in which unique and remarkable differences are not blurred but honored, and offered to the whole. In an incarnational and sacramental perceiving of life and of the world, I believe that a man and woman standing together in ministry offer an essential symbol of this movement towards creative unification.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, for the identity and wholeness of the church and of clergy women, we must embrace our tradition which from its origins had women ministering and preaching the Word.

Thus far, we have discussed the benefit of this kind of study for the church and for clergy women. We now wish to look at the implications of this study as it relates particularly to preaching.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR PREACHING

We have very little information from the ancient sources that indicates the content of the women's preaching. There are the few quotes in chapter four from the New Prophecy movement and then we must make some assumptions based on what we know about preaching. We must not presume that these women did not speak from their own genuine experience of faith. Evidence indicates they preached autonomously and freely using images and traditions important to them. It is likely that there was a variety of styles and approaches to preaching, just as we see today. The women of the New Prophecy, from the material we do

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<sup>5</sup>Barbara Troxell, "Team Ministry as Possibility," in Clare Benedicks Fischer, Betsy Brenneman, and Anne McGrew Bennett (eds.) Women in a Strange Land (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 55-56.

have, seemed to be experience oriented. From pages 51-52 of this paper we noted "Christ came to me"..."The Lord sent me"..."they will receive visions." We have also discussed Dennis MacDonald's intriguing theory that the order of Widows may have been story tellers. Story telling is removed from the more objective philosophical mode. These were women who were speaking out of and sharing their own faith experiences. Women told their stories, the stories of others, and shared their faith with others.

I find this exciting in light of the current emphasis upon story. There are new books flooding the market which emphasize the lure and power of story in the teaching and preaching ministries of the church. Perhaps what we are experiencing is the basic mode of communication that is responsible for our faith being kept alive, which is the oral tradition that was passed on in the form of story and personal testimony.

One of the main characteristics of the women's movement is the experience of "telling our story." Women have rediscovered the tremendous power that comes from sharing the faith as personally experienced. Women in seminaries all across the country have spent endless hours in small groups telling their stories to one another and to the community. When the story has been repressed for a long time, there may be many hours spent in vigil, waiting and helping to give birth to the first words uttered.

By telling our story, we share out of our own faith journey. The dynamic realm of experience is brought into the community of faith. Dr. Nelle Morton made the point that theologizing is not just



reflection on experience (which says the experience is "out there"), but is also the very experience now.

She continued her point further by using the parable as an example. If we have to tell the point of the parable we have lost the integrity of it. Rather we experience the parable and let it do its work on us. By experiencing the story, the change is already occurring. Dr. Morton challenges us to "hear with our eyes and to see with our ears." We must put ourselves into the form and then the content comes afresh. We must allow the story (someone else's and our story) do its work on us.<sup>6</sup>

An observation based on conversations with clergy women of my denomination is that women tend to tell stories in their preaching. They rarely use jokes. The style tends to be one of reflecting upon their lives and sharing that with the congregation as it helps to illumine the Biblical text.

I grew up in the church hearing many football and war stories in sermons. That is one kind of experience that may reflect a specific time era. It also reflects the realm of experience of the male preacher. Women sharing their experiences bring in another realm. This is not to say they are mutually exclusive, but it is true that due to social conditioning, women and men do not have identical experiences. Women telling their stories restores a balance in our understandings of today and of history. As the consciousness of society changes, so will these

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<sup>6</sup>This conversation with Dr. Morton took place at Seminary Quarter at Grailville, Loveland, Ohio, 1974.

observations. But for this point in time, it is a sacred act to lift women's experience up to the realm of faith by its presence in the pulpit. It is a realization of the affirmation of wholeness in Genesis 1:27.

We have examined the early church evidence for women's participation in preaching and prophetic ministries. We have briefly discussed current issues for women preachers. We see that incorporating the Biblical story into our lives today is of utmost importance for the church as a whole and for women in particular. The task before us is to begin to educate ourselves and others in the church, to our inclusive, grace-filled, and challenging heritage. If we share this story, perhaps the day will come when we do not need to "sacrifice the woman" because we will have known all our lives that our daughters DID prophesy.

The calls of women to preach are not for the purpose of delineating female or male experience. We are called to preach the Good News of God's grace and salvation for all people. God calls us each individually and by name. God calls us out of our own unique experiences which shape our understandings and perceptions of the Good News. It also affects how we preach the Good News. God calls us out of our bondage, out of the abyss, out of the demon's grip, to stand up and speak the Truth. We stand in a long and rich tradition of women and men who stood up and said YES to God's call, whose lives bear witness to the continual creative presence of God who never lets us go and who continues to call our names.

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